

Proposed Outline for “States Helping Schools Improve Act”

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Section 1. **Short Title** - “States Helping Schools Improve Act”

Sec. 2. **Findings** - For States to perform their responsibility to help low-achieving public schools improve, it is important for the States to be able to regularly evaluate schools’ strengths and improvement needs, provide the schools necessary technical assistance and supplemental resources, monitor their implementation of key improvement strategies, and intervene appropriately in extreme situations. While these have not traditionally been the States’ roles, and they do not have much experience performing them, other countries, especially England, have had extensive experience using “school inspectorates” (sometimes termed “school quality reviews/SQRs”) as the principal means of evaluating their schools’ needs and performance, thereby also providing a basis for further assistance and interventions, when necessary.

As part of its high priority effort to assist States to improve low-performing schools, the federal government could significantly enhance States’ institutional and human capacities to perform these roles if it helped them establish a school quality review system. In conjunction with establishing SQRs, States would also provide assurance that they have already established, or will establish within their SEAs, well-staffed and well-funded offices of technical assistance and resources, so that they would have the capacity to carry out SQR recommendations for assistance, and skilled offices of accountability, to implement SQR intervention recommendations. Since: it would take some experimenting to maximize the effectiveness of the SQRs and their working together with the other offices; it cannot be known in advance how helpful this new review and improvement system would be; and federal funds are limited, this new system should be instituted initially on a “pilot” basis.

Sec. 3. **Purpose** - The purpose of this bill is to create a grant program to enable a number of States to establish, on a “pilot” basis, a school quality review and improvement system to help identify the improvement needs of their low-performing schools and support their improvement. The system would utilize professional SQR teams that would provide high quality, independent, periodic evaluation of all aspects of school operations, make recommendations for improvement or appropriate interventions by the LEA or SEA, and refer the schools to necessary technical assistance or other resources. Reviews would begin in schools with the most prolonged, lowest student achievement.

Sec. 4. **Definitions** - The following would become defined terms: “school quality review/SQR system” and “reviewer.”

Sec. 5. **Structure of the School Quality Review System** - The school quality review system would be managed by a State School Quality Review Office, led by an accomplished educator knowledgeable about the school improvement process, and selected by the Governor or other top State political

official. In its application, a State would describe how the Office would have statewide authority consistent with state law and have a structure that is protected from state and political pressures. (The purpose of insulating the office from political and partisan pressures would be to maximize its credibility, and the public's belief in its credibility, as a professional and objective evaluator of schools.) The Office's professional staff would consist chiefly of accomplished educators.

The SQR Office's responsibilities would include: establishing the hiring criteria for school quality reviewers, certifying that they were qualified prior to employment; training reviewers in school improvement strategies and school evaluation techniques and procedures as appropriate/necessary to carry out the review process effectively; developing the protocols for inspections; observing and evaluating reviewers' work pursuant to a process it would have established and removing those whose work was inadequate; and ensuring that the reviewers' findings and recommendations are impartial, high quality and informed by evidence. Each State office would need to hire a broad range of reviewers, representing different kinds of educational experience and knowledge, so that each SQR system would be equipped to effectively evaluate urban, rural and suburban schools, at all grade levels, and serving the diversity of student populations in that State.

Each participating State would have the discretion to decide whether it wished to operate its SQR entirely with State employees or instead to contract out some, or all, of the actual review work to private contractors. If the State elected to hire contractors, the contracts would be developed, bid and enforced by the SQR office. The State could also decide whether it wished to operate its SQR system solely by itself, or whether it wished to join a consortium with one or more other States for purposes of training reviewers and/or conducting reviews.

Most reviewers would be accomplished educators. (Based on the English experience, many of the reviewers are likely to be successful, retired principals and teachers, so as to both take advantage of their experience and minimize pulling effective current educators away from their schools.) Provided, that each State would have discretion to include a small percentage of laypeople (especially, accomplished community or parent organizational, or professional, business or labor representatives) to enhance the perceived legitimacy, insight and understanding of its SQR process; all such lay reviewers would have to be specially trained. When assembled, a team would have among its members the necessary knowledge and experience to collectively engage in a fair and thorough review of a school, with particular attention to the educational opportunities provided to historically low-performing groups of students.

Sec. 6. School Quality Review Process and Content - The SQR process would proceed in three phases: pre-site visit, site visit, and post-site visit.

- a. *Pre-site visit* - Before a team of reviewers visited a school, the team members would gather and analyze only data that is required by the federal or state government, or otherwise available, and that is related to the following factors: 1) student outcomes (scores on state and other useful assessments, grade promotion, graduation, attendance and other such data); 2) demographics and needs of the student body; 3) teachers, administrators and

other professional staff (qualifications, years of experience, evaluations, etc.); 4) school funding and physical resources, including facilities, laboratories, and books; 5) other school-based data such as school climate surveys or surveys of parents or the community; 6) the school's own improvement plan and any reports based on it, including any key strategies the Government has required the school to use in an improvement process, such as Race to the Top or School Improvement Grants; and 7) previous SQR reports.

- b. *Site visit* - In visiting a school, teams of reviewers would inspect facilities, plant, library, technology, books, supplies, science equipment and other physical resources, and look in depth at: 1) principal and distributed leadership; 2) school climate and culture, including expectations for students' learning, supportiveness of school environment for students, and disciplinary processes; 3) the extent of peer collaboration or staff isolation; 4) curriculum level, breadth and quality, including relationship to state standards; 5) teaching, including the level of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills; 6) the availability of sufficient numbers of specialized instructional support personnel; 7) the nature, scope and efficacy of professional development for teachers and other professional staff; 8) the existence of programs of parenting skills and adult literacy, and adult mentors for students without families available, to strengthen family support for students' learning at home; 9) programs to involve parents in the school, including, but not limited to, their own child; 10) coordination and availability of community health, enrichment and other services for students and their families; 11) student work, including writing samples and other products, if available, oral presentations and demonstrations of performance in the arts, music and scientific experiments (randomly selected); and 12) staff evaluation processes.

SQR team members would observe all, or most, teachers conducting class, shadow representative students, talk with the principal and other administrators, teachers, students, parents, school instructional service personnel, and other community members who work directly with, or whose work significantly impacts, the school and its students, and give helpful feedback to the individual staff members whom they had observed. (Observation of all teachers and provision of individual constructive feedback to many was a helpful part of the English inspectorate during the relevant 1993-2005 period.) During the review, team members would meet periodically to make any needed changes to the review process, discuss their observations, develop preliminary conclusions, and give initial feedback to the school. (Based on the English experience, schools are more likely to implement reviewers' recommendations where the schools respect their reviewers, the quality of the inspection, and especially the feedback they are given.)

- c. *Post-site visit* - After their visit, the reviewers would divide responsibility for writing the final report, with one reviewer designated the lead reviewer to write the bulk of the report, and other reviewers certain sections. They would prepare, revise and complete drafting their final report, a process that normally takes multiple drafts to reach consensus. The report would address all of the issues that the team believed significant, including: the extent and adequacy of principal and distributed leadership; the nature of school climate and culture, including expectations for student learning, supportiveness of the environment, and extensiveness of peer collaboration; teachers' knowledge, skills and teaching effectiveness; level and comprehensiveness of the core curriculum provided to all students, as well as additional course options; the extent to which professional development meets that school's particular staff members' needs; comprehensiveness and fairness of staff evaluation processes; relations with, and support to, parents; student learning outcomes based on multiple sources of evidence, including state test scores and samples of student classroom work; the status and results of implementing its improvement plan and key improvement strategies; what school and community resources are available and how, and how well, they are being used; any other major strengths or problems detected; and recommendations for any needed school improvements, technical assistance, resource support, and interventions.

This proposed final report would be submitted to the school for timely review and, at a minimum, opportunity to correct any factual mistakes. The SQR team would promptly make any final revisions in light of the comments it received and transmit the final report to the SQR office. The final report would then be sent forthwith to the school, the local educational agency and the public.

Sec. 7. Coordination with State Office(s) Responsible for Technical Assistance, Resources and Accountability - In conjunction with implementing the SQR system, each participating SEA would also need to have an office that would help to implement the SQR recommendations. The two key functions would be to: 1) provide, by itself and/or through contractors, all the technical assistance and resources which it, working closely with the school and the local educational agency, determined were necessary and appropriate to carry out the SQR team's improvement recommendations, and 2) where the SQR team recommended more intrusive actions - such as staff replacement or even school closure - then, after consulting with the local educational agency and the school, take such actions as it determined appropriate to implement the SQR team's intervention recommendations. A state may use an SQR to modify its transformation strategies in any school, including those receiving SIG or RTTT grants.

If a state does not have the capacity to perform these functions, it would need to create such capacity. (Staff members would need to be experienced educators knowledgeable about how to assist low-performing schools to turn around.)

Sec. 8. Scope of Grants -

- a. *Schools Covered* - In the first five years after authorization of the SQR program, school quality reviews would be conducted in at least the lowest-scoring ten percent of schools in each participating State, with scores to include, at a minimum, school data required by ESEA. Reviews would be conducted first on the lowest-scoring five percent of schools. (Focusing on this ten percent would enable SQRs to evaluate and help guide RTTT and SIG schools for which decisions on the turnaround process have not yet been made as well as such schools which have already begun that process. It would also assist other of the lowest-scoring schools that are not in SIG or RTTT by providing evaluations and the most useful strategies from the outset.)

States could also elect to apply for grants that would provide SQRs for up to twenty percent of their schools. If appropriations remained after the Secretary had funded all the eligible ten percent coverage applications, the Secretary could also fund applications to provide up to twenty percent coverage. (Alternatively, the bill could require participating states to plan to evaluate twenty percent of their schools, under the schedule in Section 9 below; the amount appropriated would need to increase toward the end of the period to hire additional reviewers and, in years 5 and beyond, conduct the additional reviews.)

If the evaluations described in subsection 12.b. below show that the SQR program, overall, helps schools improve, Congress would intend to expand it in future years so that it would be made available to all schools needing substantial improvement to meet ESEA's goals.

- b. *Number of States* - The Secretary of Education would select as grantees as many as one-quarter of the States (12-14)- to the extent possible, geographically diverse and including States that are heavily rural.
- c. *Duration of the Grants* - Initial grants for establishing and operating School Quality Review systems shall be for five years.

Sec. 9. Frequency of School Quality Reviews - By the beginning of the fourth year after authorization, school quality review systems will have conducted a review of a significant portion of the lowest-scoring five percent of schools, and henceforth will conduct a review annually for each of the lowest-scoring five percent of schools and, at a minimum, every two years for schools in the next five percent. No later than the beginning of the fifth year, any states receiving funds to have SQRs serve more than ten percent of its schools will begin to conduct SQRs for those schools at least every three years. (This would be the schedule if the full twenty percent option were required of participating SEAs.) States may also elect to conduct such reviews more frequently if they believe that that would advance their school improvement process.

Sec. 10. Application - Any State, or consortium of states desiring a grant under this Act shall submit to the Secretary of Education an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information

as the Secretary may require. States would be given substantial discretion as to how to frame their individual SQR plans, provided they address the core areas intended by this Act.

Sec. 11. Establishment of “States Helping Schools Improve Office” in the U.S. Department of Education

The Secretary shall establish a “States Helping Schools Improve Office” within the Department for the purpose of expanding the Department’s capacity to assist State educational agencies help their low-performing schools do dramatically better. The Office shall be staffed by educators knowledgeable about, and experienced in, helping schools improve.

Sec. 12. Guidelines, Monitoring, Evaluations and Reports -

- a. *Guidelines* - After the Secretary has closely reviewed the domestic and international experience with school inspectorates, the Secretary shall issue guidelines, based on best practices, for the conduct of SQR systems in the States. Guidelines shall be issued within 4 months of authorization. Applications from SEAs shall be due within 10 months of authorization and, subject to appropriations, grants shall be awarded within 12 months of authorization.
- b. *Evaluations* - At the end of the second and fourth years of the initial grants (probably the end of the third and fifth years after authorization), the Secretary shall evaluate, directly, or through grants or contracts, the operations and effectiveness of each State’s School Quality Review system, including the use of SQR reports in state improvement and accountability efforts, for the purpose of learning which strategies and practices are working best and which not so well, and to determine the extent to which states do provide necessary and appropriate resources and support to schools, as recommended by the SEA reviews.
- c. *Report and Dissemination* - The Department shall promptly analyze, summarize and report the results of these evaluations, including lessons learned, and release them, and the evaluations of each state, to the public.
- d. *Monitoring and Assistance to the States* - Through the “States Helping Schools Improve Office,” the Department shall periodically monitor the work of the SQR systems in each State, including annually observing a range of SQR school site visits. That Office shall provide assistance and support to the participating States as to any aspect of the Act’s programs for which the States seek assistance.

Sec. 13. Authorization of Appropriations - Congress would authorize to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the programs established by this Act for the initial five year grant period. (Beginning with Richard Rothstein's determination that it would cost about \$1.3 billion/yr. to conduct inspections of all U.S. public schools every five to six years, and more frequently for those schools "found ... inadequate", we project that the cost of the pilot program proposed here would be about \$130 million/yr. if all the participants served only 10% of their schools. This figure is derived by first dividing \$1.3 billion by $\frac{1}{4}$, since only that many states would be in the pilot i.e., \$325 million; then multiplying that by 10%, since each state would only serve 10% of its schools, i.e., \$32.5 million; then multiplying that by 4, because these 10% of schools would be reviewed every 1-2 years, rather than every 5-6 years, i.e., \$130 million. If two of the states were funded to serve 20% of their schools, rather than 10%, this would only increase the total cost by about \$10 million/yr, for a total of about \$140 million/yr. The \$10 million additional cost is estimated by dividing \$130 million for 13 States with 10% coverage into \$10 million/state@10%; next, divide that \$10 million/yr./state by 2, because the second 10% of schools would only be inspected one-half as often, i.e., every 3 years instead of every 1 ½ years on average for the lowest 10% of schools; then add that same amount, \$5 million/yr., for each of two states to cover a second 10% of schools in each state, or \$5 million x 2= \$10 million; \$130 million[for 13 states@10%] + \$10 million [for two of those states adding a second 10%] = \$140 million/yr. Should the bill seek to cover 20% of the schools in each participating state, then the cost will be approximately \$195 million per year when fully operational; that full sum would not be needed until year 4 when states gear up to evaluate the next 10%.)

Congress would also authorize \$___ for the operations of the Department's new "States Helping Schools Improve Office," including covering the cost of conducting evaluations.

Sec. 14. Regulations - The Secretary would issue such regulations and guidelines as may be necessary to properly implement and administer such programs.

Gary Ratner, Esq., Executive Director, Citizens for Effective Schools, and Monty Neill, Ed.D., Interim Executive Director, FairTest